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1959/11/04

SECRETFROM WASHINGTON TO FOREIGN OFFICE.

Cypher/OTP

PRISEC

Sir H. Caccia

No. 2335

November 4, 1959.

D. 1.39 a.m. November 5, 1959.
R. 3.24 a.m. November 5, 1959.IMMEDIATEDEDIPSECRET

My immediately preceding telegram.

Following is text.

Begins.

Dear Selwyn:

I do appreciate your writing me about your problem regarding the Cuban Government's request to exchange Sea Fury aircraft for the same number of Hawker Hunters. It is clear that you have cooperated splendidly with us in the handling of this whole problem difficult as it is, of restricting the shipment of arms to the Caribbean area during the past several months. This makes all the more lamentable the Press stories of last month alleging that we had "protested" the aircraft exchange as proposed by the Castro Government. We did our best to set the record straight and I assure you that we shall do everything possible to avoid a recurrence. That kind of publicity has, of course not only made your task more onerous but also unfortunately imposed on us the necessity of dealing with public opinion here on British-United States cooperation in an area in our immediate vicinity.

X I also recognize that the inadvertent release of five helicopters to Cuba last June and other matters to which you refer have doubtless added to the difficulties confronting you in this case. However we are fully convinced that the close consultation which has been going forward between us on this matter has been beneficial in the development of a cooperative approach to this difficult problem and we intend to continue to work closely with you, tightening up on any loopholes which may have existed. There does seem to be some misunderstanding as to the facts in the cases which you cite and we have already sent word to London that we are preparing a memorandum setting forth the facts as we understand them. In any case, I wish to assure you that we will do everything possible to avoid making your position with respect to cooperating with us on this matter more difficult. X

In analyzing the problem of arms for the Caribbean, we realized that the countries persisting in their efforts to buy arms would be able to obtain them somewhere. We decided, however, that some positive advantage would be derived from our own position

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of having refused to engage in sales (or grants) which might contribute to the build-up of tensions in the area. Presumably you might also see some beneficial result from having the onus placed on somebody else.

Castro's public statement indicating that he might go behind the Iron Curtain to get jet fighters if you do not approve his deal as requested is the newest element in this situation. We cannot be certain that this is a bluff on Castro's part, and the Soviets might well be tempted to make a few jets available to the Cubans on favourable terms directly or through one of the satellites, in order to make trouble in this hemisphere. We are, however, prepared to take this risk. It may be mitigated somewhat by the consideration that the Soviets themselves might hesitate at this time to take such a provocative action close to our shores and by any reluctance on their part openly to taint the Castro Government with too close connexions with the Soviet Bloc. As general background, I would like to analyse briefly the present Cuban situation as we see it from here:

Castro seems to be burning all of his bridges behind him. Each day the area for possible cooperation between his Government and ours, if not indeed between it and the entire Free World, is reduced. There is good evidence that his moderate advisers are discouraged and even frightened, with their counsel going unheeded. The worst of the Castro team -- his brother Raul, "Che" Guevara and their ilk -- are clearly in the ascendency. The Communists are deeply imbedded in the National Agrarian Reform Institute, other Government bodies, the informational media, the universities, and are making progress with organized labor. Their sympathizers are the dominant element in the armed forces. While the Communists had influence in Cuba in 1933-34 and 1946, this is the first time they have had such powerful support at or near the top.

Castro's economic programs are clearly designed to bring about massive State intervention in all sectors. It may be that before long the only way he can postpone the inevitable judgment day, economically speaking, is for the State to buy in virtually all goods produced and attempt to sell at higher prices in the world market. Peron brought his own destruction by this technique.

X We do not think that the Cuban people will tolerate Castro indefinitely. Opposition within the country is mounting and his downfall is probably only a question of time. He still has great popular support from the Cuban working class and peasants, but they will be equally susceptible to Opposition arguments as unemployment mounts and economic problems begin to press on them, recalling that Cuba has had a relatively high

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standard of living for Latin America. What among other things we have to take into account is that, while charges of cooperation with the Batista régime are certainly damaging, at some future date it may be equally or even more damaging to be charged with having contributed to the acquisition of arms used for civil strife.

We should also make clear that the issue of our cooperation with Left-Wing Governments in Latin America does not arise in this instance. Our record for instance with respect to cooperation with Bolivia and Venezuela make it clear that Leftist orientation is not an obstacle to obtaining sympathy and support for legitimate objectives. We have sought, since Castro came to power, to exercise the greatest restraint in the face of provocation and to take a position as sympathetic as possible to what he claimed were the objectives of his program. We would certainly have been willing, even anxious, to cooperate with him had he set out on a genuine reform program within the framework of good relations with us and the Free World.

I wish I could describe a happier situation in this pleasant land only ninety miles from our southern border. However, as you are aware, Castro's gratuitous attacks on the United States have alienated opinion in this country and created growing resentment in the Press and in the Congress, you can well imagine and may wish to consider the effects of the adverse reaction in this country if the decision is made to deliver modern jet aircraft at this time to his Government. Also in this connexion, I am sure that you are aware that supplies in other countries have exhibited a laudable attitude in complying with their government's restraints designed to prevent an arms race in the Caribbean which could clearly have serious consequences and which we are doing everything possible to prevent. Available evidence indicates to us that a British agreement to release jet aircraft to Castro at this time would probably seriously weaken, if not altogether remove, this restraint and create a far worse situation than now exists.

I am sure that you will want to make your decision in the light of these considerations, which seem very important to us. We shall try to understand whatever it is. I did think that you should know how we feel about combat arms going to Castro Cuba — such arms are apt to be used by an extreme Leftist Government which is already deeply penetrated by Communists; they might even be used for purposes hostile to the principles for which the Free World stands; they conceivably could postpone the inevitable day when Castro will have to face judgment for the mistakes he has committed.

I repeat that I am most grateful to have your frank exposition of your views on this subject.

With warmest personal regards,
most sincerely,
Chris.

Ends.

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